

Ruddy Duck

Oxyura jamaicensis

Category C1

Very rare vagrant

7 records

A native of the Americas, the Ruddy Duck became established in Britain after captive birds escaped from the Slimbridge WWT reserve and began breeding in Somerset from the late 1950s (Snow & Perrins, 1998).

It gradually spread westwards, first reaching Kent in 1970, with almost annual records from 1975, although breeding was not confirmed until 1995 (Taylor *et al*, 1981, Clements *et al*, 2013).

As the population grew (to 6,000 in Britain by 2001) and the range expanded, records from continental Europe increased and the species spread as far south as Spain and Morocco.



Ruddy Duck (with Pochard) at Nickolls Quarry
(Ian Roberts)

It was first record locally in 1985 when R. & S. Philpott found four at Nickolls Quarry on the 17th February. After a gap of eight years Roger Norman recorded immature/females there on single dates in four consecutive years from 1993. There were no further sightings until 2002, when a female took up residence at Nickolls Quarry from the 15th November and lingered into early January 2003. Later that year a male was seen at the same site on the 8th May.

The records by year are shown in figure 1.

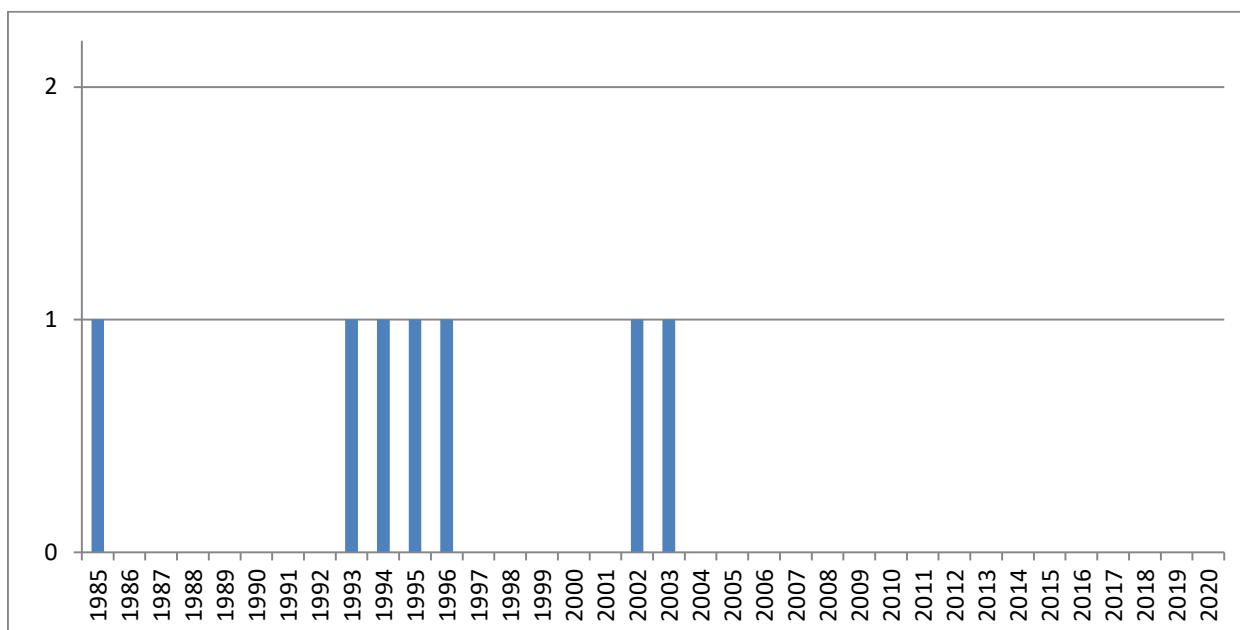


Figure 1: Ruddy Duck records at Folkestone and Hythe

Once it had arrived in Spain the Ruddy Duck began to hybridise with the endangered White-headed Duck, producing fertile offspring and thereby posing a major threat to the survival of this species. Although the Spanish authorities were able to deal effectively with the small numbers of Ruddy Ducks that had arrived in the country, the growing British population would have eventually made European colonisation inevitable and so in 2005 a five-year eradication programme began in Britain. Over 7,000 were culled and as a result numbers fell to probably fewer than 100 by 2011 (Henderson, no date).

The programme also managed to secure agreement at the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention for the eradication of the species completely across Europe by 2015 (Cranswick & Hall, 2010). Although this further programme did not fully achieve its aim, very few Ruddy Ducks remain in Europe today.

Between 2005 and June 2018 a total of 625 Ruddy Ducks were shot in Kent and it appears to have become extinct as a breeding bird in the county. Recent Kent Bird Reports list just single sightings in 2016 and 2017, but up to four were present in the Dungeness area in the first half of 2018 (A&PHA, 2017, Clements *et al*, 2015, KOS, 2018, 2019 & 2020).

The records by week are given in figure 2. Apart from singles on 18th September and 8th May, all have arrived between the 21st November (week 47) and 23rd February (week 8), as shown in figure 2. Some, though not all, records were associated with cold weather.

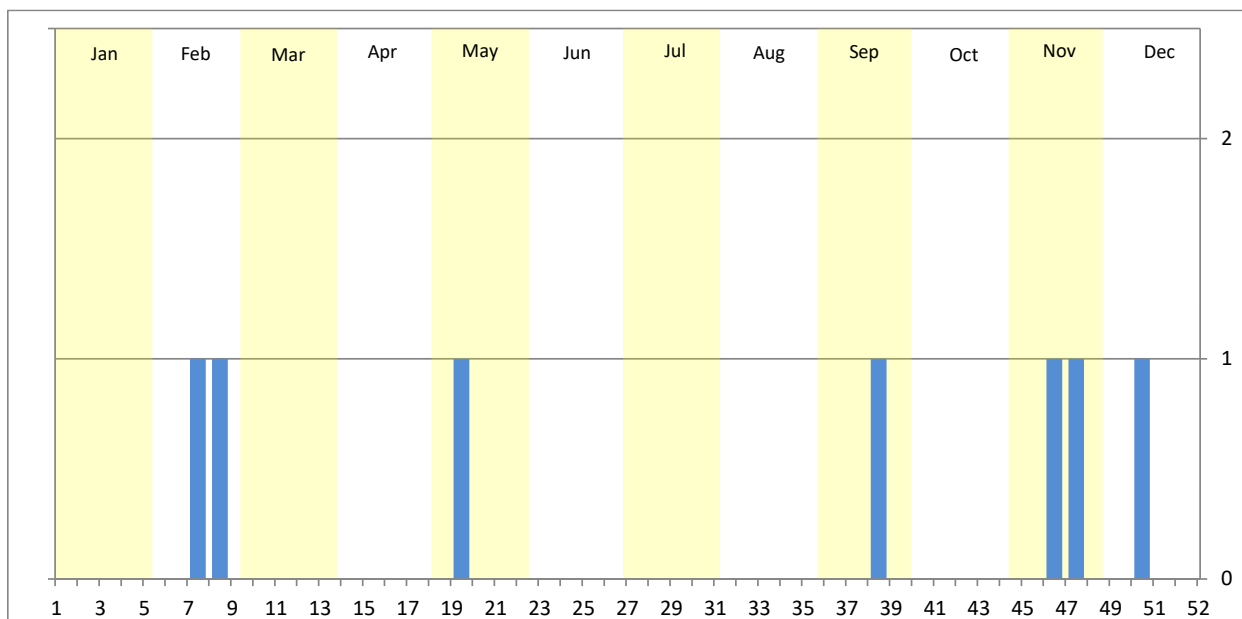


Figure 2: Ruddy Duck records at Folkestone and Hythe by week

The distribution of records by tetrad are shown in figure 3. All records have been from Nickolls Quarry, and all but one were seen on just a single date, with the other lingering for 51 days.



Figure 3: Distribution of all Ruddy Duck records at Folkestone and Hythe by tetrad

Although not impossible, further area records would now appear to be extremely unlikely.

The full list of records is as follows:

- 1985** Nickolls Quarry, four, 17th February (R. & S. Philpott)
1993 Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 21st November (R. K. Norman)
1994 Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 18th September (R. K. Norman)
1995 Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 10th December (R. K. Norman)
1996 Nickolls Quarry, immature/female, 23rd February (R. K. Norman)
2002 Nickolls Quarry, female, 15th November to 5th January 2003, photographed (R. K. Norman, I. A. Roberts)
2003 Nickolls Quarry, male, 8th May (R. K. Norman)

References

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Acknowledgements

The tetrad map images were produced from the Ordnance Survey [Get-a-map service](#) and are reproduced with kind permission of [Ordnance Survey](#).